

WHAT IS THE WALC?

The **Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils** is the only body in the area specialising full-time in the work of Local Councils. Membership of the WALC is paid for by annual subscription and of the 174 Councils in the County some 150 are members. The Association is run by a committee of 25 Councillors and nominees elected by the members.

The Association, and therefore its members, is affiliated to the National Association of Local Councils which has full-time solicitors, financial experts, administrators and consultants on hand to advise and assist the Counties and it represents over 7500 Local Councils nationally. Informed advice is available locally to members on legal, technical, financial and general matters with just one phone call.

Further details available from: -

**The County Secretary
Warwickshire and West Midlands Association
of Parish and Town Councils
Warwick Enterprise Park, Wellesbourne, Warwickshire
CV35 9EF**

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Thanks to the Gloucester Association
of Parish and Town Councils for providing their model for
this leaflet



THINKING OF BECOMING

A PARISH COUNCILLOR

OR TOWN COUNCILLOR?

WHY ME?

You are probably reading this pamphlet because someone has suggested that you might wish to stand for election to your local Council. Whether you have agreed to read this with enthusiasm, reluctance (or even suspicion), these introductory notes will help you to understand the nature of the commitment you have been asked to take on.

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

This pamphlet gives a brief introduction to the Parish Council world and what is involved in becoming a Parish Councillor. It enables you to check if you are eligible to stand for election as a Parish Councillor and it gives the timetable for the elections.

If you need further information please feel free to get in touch with the County Secretary of the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils, details are set out at the end of the pamphlet. Also talk to existing Parish Councillors and the Parish Council Clerk to get the local picture.

WHAT IS A PARISH COUNCIL?

To appreciate what is involved in being a Parish Councillor, you need to know what a Parish Council is and what it can (and cannot) do.

A Parish Council, it can also be called a Town Council, is first and foremost, the elected local authority. It is the tier of local government which is closest to the people. It is not a voluntary organisation, a charity or something to do with the Church.

Parish Councils were first created under the Local Government Act 1894 and they are still being created. New ones are being formed in the urban areas which are currently un-parished or existing parishes are being re-organised and additional ones created as a result of the growth of population in an area.

In Warwickshire and Solihull there are 174 Parish and Town Councils and 44 Parish Meetings (Note: Parish Meetings are not dealt with here).

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM ELECTED?

Before you can put your enthusiasm to work you must sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office. Your Parish Council Clerk will arrange this. You should also consider learning more about your role as a Councillor. The *WALC* provide training and advice locally

SO -

If You Want To Do More for Your Community

If You Want To Spend Your Time Productively

If You Can Think, Listen and Act Locally

BECOME A PARISH COUNCILLOR



THE ELECTION TIMETABLE

1) Ordinary elections of the Council

Ordinary elections usually coincide with the election year of the District Council and must be held on the same day. The interval between elections is 4 years and therefore your term of office would normally be 4 years.

Timetable for Elections*

Publication of Notice of Election	Not later than 25 th day before day of election, (DE)
Last date for nominations	Not later than noon on the 19 th day before DE
Publication of list of candidates	Not later than noon on the 17 th day before DE
Last date for withdrawal	Not later than noon on the 16 th day before DE
Polling	Between the hours of 7 am and 10 pm on DE

* When calculating these days the District Council must disregard Saturdays, Sundays, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Good Friday & all other Bank Holidays.

2) The filling of casual vacancies on a Council and Co-options

The process for filling casual vacancies can be different from the ordinary elections. Further information is therefore obtainable from the Returning Officer and a leaflet on this and on Co-options is available from the County Secretary of the *WALC*.

WHAT CAN THEY DO ?

As Parish Councils were created in law, they can only act within the law by exercising those powers and functions that have been conferred on them by Statutes (i.e. Acts of Parliament). Anything it tries to do outside these powers is *Ultra Vires* - outside the law.

The range of powers Councils have are many and varied and include the purchase of land and buildings, providing and maintaining village greens, the provision of recreational facilities, crime prevention measures, and traffic calming.

They have the right to be consulted by the Local Planning Authority on all planning applications in their area and can work in partnership with the principal Councils i.e. the District, Borough and County Councils.

The Parish Council can raise money by various means to do its work. Mainly it gets its funds through a levy (precept) on the Council Tax Payers in the Parish. This precept is collected by the District/Borough Council on the Parish Council's behalf.

The Clerk to the Parish Council or the County Secretary of the *WALC* will be able to tell you more about the powers and means of raising funds. As a new Councillor you won't be expected to know all about them and the *WALC* will keep the Council up to date.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE PARISH COUNCILLOR ?

The main role, is that you and your fellow Councillors have an active interest and concern for your local community. You will represent local people and, if necessary, work in partnership with them and others. Collectively you will want to facilitate the provision of local services and facilities and take decisions that form the policy of the Council. Councillors are not paid and have to abide by a local government code of conduct and declare their financial interests in the parish. Councillors must also declare a personal or prejudicial interest in any matter under discussion at a parish council meeting.

Initially, of course, you will have little knowledge of Council work but this, together with experience and confidence, will follow.

WILL IT TAKE A LOT OF MY TIME AND MONEY?

It is possible to spend a lot of time on council work - but most people have jobs, families and hobbies that also demand a lot of time. However, as with most things, the more you put in, the more you (and your community) will get out.

Generally speaking, the larger your Council's number of electors the larger your workload will be. The times of the meetings vary, as do the venues. Parish and Town Councils normally meet during the evening. It is IMPORTANT to establish the pattern of meetings and venues to make sure they can accommodate your domestic and/or business arrangements. Most Councils meet once a month and many have Committees also. In which case you would probably be invited to sit on a Committee. These usually meet in between the meetings of the full Parish Council.

Unless you take on responsibility as a Chairman or Vice-Chairman of a committee your workload as a 'back-bencher' on the Council should not involve more than one or two evenings per month. There are outside activities in which the Council takes an interest, and you may be asked to take a share of the duties in

representing the Council on these 'outside organisations'. Being a Councillor should cost you little. There is usually cover for subsistence and travel allowances if your duties take you out of your local Council's area. These allowances will be determined by the Council, and will be within a maximum laid down by the Government.

WHY ME?

As a new Councillor you will bring to the Council fresh enthusiasm and new ideas, a care for your community and a willingness to learn. You should want to take the Council and Parish forward into the new Millennium.

ARE YOU ELIGIBLE TO STAND FOR ELECTION?

A candidate for a Parish or Town Council is qualified if, when nominated - (a) he or she is a British subject or Irish citizen, (b) is *18 years of age, and (c) is either in the list of electors for that Parish or Town or has during the whole of the preceding twelve months (i) occupied land as owner or tenant in it, or (ii) had a principal place of work there, or (iii) resided in or within three miles of it.

* Lowered from 21 yrs on 2.5.07

WHAT NEXT?

The Returning Officer appointed by the District or Borough Council is the person responsible for the conduct and arrangement for Parish Council elections. If you are considering becoming a candidate for election you are very strongly recommended to contact the Returning Officer at the District Council to obtain information on what you need to do to be nominated. All of the District Councils produce leaflets on Election Procedures. It is imperative that these are followed or you may find you have disqualified yourself from candidacy.